

Hunted For



PAGES 4-5: FLICKR RF/GETTY IMAGES (DOLPHIN); INSET: HARDY JONES PRODUCTIONS



**AS YOU READ,
THINK ABOUT:**

How have humans harmed
and helped dolphins?

**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
Reads like fiction—
but it's all true

Fun, Left to Die

**The story of dolphins in peril,
and the heroic man racing to save them**

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

Hardy Jones got the phone call from the Nicaraguan government early in the morning: Two dolphins were in crisis. The animals had been captured in the Caribbean Sea, 20 miles off the coast of Nicaragua. The men who caught them had been hoping to sell them to a resort hotel with a “swim with the dolphins” program. But the deal had fallen apart, and the men had left the dolphins to die in a filthy tank.



Hardy
Jones



"I was on a plane as fast as I could move," Jones says.

By the time Jones arrived, the two dolphins—he would soon name them Nica and Blue Fields—had been trapped for two weeks. The government of Nicaragua had called in a team from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) to help. The dolphins were in desperate condition—weak, starving, and terrified. The scientists from WSPA worked to stabilize the dolphins, feeding them fish filled with nutrients and comforting them with caresses and gentle words.

But the situation was grim. It was clear to all that the dolphins would not survive even a few days more in the toxic pool.

The only hope was a daring mission that would put the dolphins at great risk. WSPA scientists along with soldiers from the Nicaraguan military would take the dolphins on an extraordinary journey by boat and helicopter to the spot in the Caribbean Sea where they had been captured.

Jones would have a critical role on this mission: filming it. For the past 33 years, Jones has made films that show how human greed and carelessness are threatening dolphins, one of Earth's most intelligent and sensitive creatures. Jones's films have helped save the lives of millions of dolphins, earning him a nickname worthy of a superhero: the dolphin defender.

Jones's camera was running as

Nica and Blue Fields were carefully **hoisted** out of the water on slings. It took four men to carry each of the more than 300-pound animals to a waiting boat. The dolphins were placed on padded trays. The team slathered them with cream to protect them from the glaring sun and cooled them with seawater to prevent them from overheating.

Nica closed her eyes and seemed to surrender to her

fate. Blue Fields made quiet, high-pitched whistling noises.

"He's crying," Jones said softly.

Nobody knew if the dolphins would survive the journey. Whatever happened to them, though, Jones would make sure that the world knew their **harrowing** story.

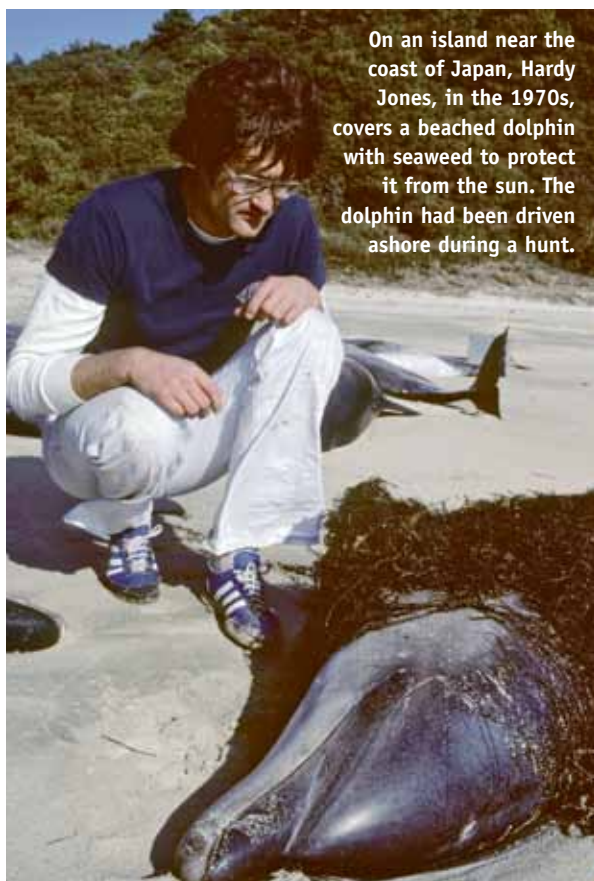
An Extraordinary Bond

In the late 1970s, when Jones began making films, little was known about dolphins in the wild. Jones, a passionate scuba diver, had long dreamed of swimming with dolphins at sea in their natural environment, but experts said it could not be done. They told Jones that if he got too close, the dolphins would flee, or perhaps turn violent.

But Jones had heard about an extended family—a pod—of friendly spotted dolphins often seen in a particular spot about 70 miles off the coast of Florida. A treasure hunter helped him find these dolphins. From the moment Jones entered the water, he was welcomed into their midst.

In fact, the dolphins seemed as curious about Jones as he was about them. They swam up to him, studying him closely. When he removed his T-shirt and let it float in the water, a dolphin grabbed it and swam away. Moments later, the dolphin reappeared and dropped the shirt in front of Jones. "It was clear to me that he knew the shirt belonged to me," Jones recalls.

Jones was astounded by the animals' intelligence and the closeness of the group. The



On an island near the coast of Japan, Hardy Jones, in the 1970s, covers a beached dolphin with seaweed to protect it from the sun. The dolphin had been driven ashore during a hunt.

dolphins **doted** on one another, cuddling close together and stroking each other with their fins. Mothers **lavished** attention on their calves. The animals seemed to communicate with each other constantly, in a language of clicks, whistles, and high-pitched shrieks that vibrated through the water.

Those early experiences left Jones with an extraordinary bond with these dolphins. It wasn't long before he decided to leave his work in television to devote himself full-time to protecting them and other creatures of the sea.

HOW DOLPHINS "SEE" WITH SOUND

Dolphins use sonar, or sound waves, to detect objects in the darkness of their underwater world. This system, known as echolocation, is so precise that they can "see" a raisin on the water hundreds of feet away! It works like this:

1 Using nasal sacs in their heads, dolphins send out rapid clicks that pass through their "melon," or forehead.

2 The sound waves bounce off the object and are relayed back to the dolphins through fatty pockets in their jaws . . .

3 . . . which send the information to their brains.

7 Million Dead

When Jones started his work, tens of thousands of dolphins were dying every year. The biggest problem was the tuna-fish industry. In the ocean, tuna tend to swim beneath dolphins, so the nets used by tuna boats entangled dolphins. The dolphins, which must surface to breathe every 10 minutes, suffocated. Some tuna boats killed hundreds of dolphins during each trip; since the late 1950s, tuna fishing has killed more than 7 million dolphins.

Even more brutal were the dolphin hunts taking place in Japan, where there is a long tradition of hunting and eating dolphins. Fishermen would drive pods of dolphins close to the shore and trap them. The youngest and

best-looking dolphins were separated, loaded onto boats, and shipped off to aquariums to perform for humans. The rest were slaughtered for their meat, or killed so they wouldn't compete with the fishermen for fish.

News of these hunts led Jones to travel to Japan, where he captured horrifying scenes of slaughter on film—men with **harpoons** and knives stabbing at helpless dolphins that thrashed, shrieking in pain, as the waters turned bright red with dolphin blood. Even today, the memory of these scenes causes Jones's voice to shake with anger and sadness.

The film he took of these hunts was shown on television around the world, sparking outrage and protests. Many of the villages

sharply reduced or even eliminated their hunts, and thousands of dolphins were undoubtedly spared.

"It was the first time I realized just how powerful a man with a camera could be," Jones has said.

In the coming years, Jones would make more films. One, about dolphins dying in the tuna nets, led to massive protests against tuna companies like StarKist and Bumble Bee. Tens of thousands of people saw the film and stopped buying tuna. They wrote furious letters to the companies' leaders and demanded that more be done to protect dolphins. This public outcry led American tuna companies to change their fishing practices. Today, all tuna sold by American companies is "dolphin safe."



LEFT: Jones's films inspired public outrage and led to many protests. **BELOW:** In Japan, dolphin meat is sold in stores and served in restaurants. Because of ocean pollution, dolphin meat often has high levels of a metal called mercury, which can be toxic to humans, causing brain damage, birth defects, even death. As a result, attitudes are changing. Soon, dolphin may be off the menu for good.



100 Miles a Day

Dolphins continue to face serious threats, however, from ocean pollution, climate change, and overfishing to continued hunting in parts of Asia, Africa, and South America. (It is illegal to hunt or capture dolphins in U.S. waters.) But perhaps the fastest-growing threat is the capture of wild dolphins, like Nica and Blue Fields, for dolphin shows and swim-with programs at resorts and hotels.

"Come for a once in a lifetime experience!" proclaims the website of a popular Florida resort. "Talk, touch, play, and swim with our gentle and exquisite bottlenose dolphins." The accompanying photographs feature excited guests clinging to dolphins, which appear to be smiling with delight.

But such images are deceptive. Dolphins don't smile as humans do. Their mouths are naturally upturned; even a dolphin lying

dead in the water wears the "smiling" expression of a dolphin carrying a tourist on its back.

Certainly some aquariums provide excellent care for their captive dolphins. But in the wild, dolphins swim up to 100 miles in a single day. Most live in the same tightly knit pod for their entire lives—40 to 50 years. It's hard to imagine that such a free-roaming and social creature could ever be content in a concrete and Plexiglas enclosure. Indeed, 53 percent of wild dolphins die within three months of being captured.

Nica and Blue Fields were spared that fate, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the WSPA and the Nicaraguan government. The dolphins had survived the first boat ride and a helicopter trip. And now they were on another boat, speeding across the Caribbean Sea.

The boat stopped near the place where the dolphins had been

captured. Jones's camera was running as the team released the dolphins off the side of the boat.

Nica went first. The moment she hit the water, she took off. When Blue Fields hit the water, he seemed **disoriented**, as though he had just woken up from a nightmare. At last, he swam off. Hopefully, they would find their family. But would they ever forget how they had suffered?

It's impossible to know. Thanks to Jones, though, the world will not forget the story of Nica and Blue Fields. The film footage he shot of their ordeal has already been seen by millions of people.

The film reveals how humans can threaten this dazzling animal.

And it proves that we can help them too. ●

“Our Animals Receive Excellent Care”

The marine park association speaks out

Organizations like SeaWorld have a reputation for helping animals and caring for the environment. Millions visit their parks every year. So when we started this story, we reached out to SeaWorld to get their point of view on dolphin hunts and swim-with programs. They put us in touch with Marilee Menard, the executive director of the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums—an international association of parks (including SeaWorld), aquariums, zoos, and research centers. This is what she had to say:

Do you buy dolphins from the drives in Japan?

Members of the Alliance condemn the Japanese drive fisheries and the inhumane slaughter of the dolphins that die by this practice. The Alliance and its members do not support, fund, or acquire animals from the Japanese drive fisheries. We also have urged U.S. government and representative agencies to work with the government of Japan to bring an end to this cruel practice.

Where do your dolphins come from?

The majority of dolphins—almost 70 percent cared for by Alliance members—are born in **accredited** facilities. Members have established strict policies that define how animals may be acquired, and emphasize breeding, minimizing the need for collecting dolphins from the wild. Policies mandate that any collection from the wild be done humanely, legally, and use only safe and professional methods.

Why do you have dolphin-interaction programs?

Interactive programs are educational and inspire guests to be better **stewards** of the environment. When children—and adults—see and experience

the excitement of being close to marine mammals such as whales, dolphins, and sea lions, it **resonates** in ways that even the most vividly illustrated book or video cannot. It is an emotionally enriching experience that fosters a sense of caring for these animals and their ocean environments.

How do you know your interactive programs are not harmful to the dolphins?

The Alliance has **stringent** standards and guidelines that ensure the animals receive excellent care. Our standards require that animals be given the choice of whether they participate in an interactive program. All facilities have areas where guests are not allowed, available to animals that choose not to participate.

If I’m at a resort that offers a swim-with program, how do I know that the dolphins are treated humanely and that they weren’t caught in an illegal hunt?

The best advice is to go on a park’s or aquarium’s website and see if it is an accredited member of the Alliance or another responsible organization.



A swim-with program

CONTEST

Saving the Dolphins In the story you just read, you learned that dolphins have faced many threats over the years. In two to three well-organized paragraphs, summarize these threats and explain at least three ways people have helped dolphins. Use evidence from the article and the interview to support your ideas. Send your response to **DOLPHIN CONTEST**. Five winners will each receive a copy of *Sound Bender* by Lin Oliver and Theo Baker. See page 2 for details.

GET THIS
ACTIVITY
ONLINE

